1: Mi Mi Khaing I-5 (no date) 1946 AP1 Burma
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# CHAPTER TEN

000 ONE living force had continued at the old house, however, from the time it was built right to the present day. This was my mother's elder sister, our Kyi-Kyi Lon, the same who had thrown herself on the ground at first beholding the muddy fields of Thaton. She had never been to an English school like my mother and indeed had known no other home but the old house all her life. My Kyi-Kyi (aunt-elder-than-parent) is unmarried. The story of how she remained unmarried is stamped with her character.

587 My eldest aunt was married and died after bearing three children,
589 and the bereaved husband came back to Grandfather and asked for the hand of another aunt so that the children should not lack a loving mother's care. This aunt also died, and the hardy widower again returned to Grandfather. Grandfather might have been persuaded to give another daughter in marriage but Kyi-Kyi Lon, who was next on the list, stamped her feet and shooed the widower away, regardless of the belief that a man who survives two wives is outlived by his third. She inherited my grandfather's spirit and vitriolic temper, and a very lively tongue. When she was young she was round and sturdy and was therefore called Ma Lon, Miss Round. With years of spinsterhood, roundness disappeared, the sturdiness developed into a masculine toughness and her natural abilities turned to business management; her feet broadened and she could tramp for miles; with her sharp tongue she could make men quail. It was our Kyi-Kyi who looked after our rubber estates for us. My mother stood in awe of her, and it was a beautiful lesson in gentle humanity to watch the sisters together. My mother had two aspects to her nature. She had an all-round ability equal to Kyi-Kyi Lon's, but there was a gentleness which tempered every masculine ability she possessed. This tempering was always imposed above. In my aunt's presence, the lower stratum automatically disappeared, because Kyi-Kyi, who quarrelled with everyone else, loved my mother like a child who must be scolded and looked after. She therefore devoted her life to our interests.

186 My aunt never learnt English, and derided the refined tones of
• 196 English pronunciation. She never made the slightest concession to any foreign tongue. Surrounded by a world in which products and institutions bore English names, she took delight in pronouncing unavoidable terms with the broadest Burmese accent. "Ine-Si-Et", she would

say for I.C.S., with a marked emphasis on the last word which is pronounced with a glottal stop, and thus pronounced means "cracked". After listening to a conversation in English she would seize on what she heard most often, "You know" and "I know". "*You no, I no, hnit-yauk no, tha-hko ma-la-naing*," she would say, punning on the word "know", which in Burmese means to wake up. "You wake, I wake, two awake—the thieves cannot come."

Kyi-Kyi lived an independent life; she had inherited a share of the house, among other things, and she lived there on what was due to her from the management of our property. Between her and one servant maid, the old house was kept spotless. A meal was cooked every day for the monastery, and Kyi-Kyi was on very amiable social terms with the monks and the nuns who lived close by. Everyone in Thaton knew her, the young men admired her for her lively wit and the women called her a harridan for it. Between visiting us and business and religious good works and scolding everyone, my Kyi-Kyi spent a busy life.

She was so different from my mother. My mother never smoked or chewed betel, but when Kyi-Kyi came we were treated to watching her roll her cheroots. She had the *hsay*, mixture, in a bowl. It was a compound of chopped tobacco leaves, the stem and pith of the *ohn-nè* (coconut flower), and jaggery or sugar. It was a sticky mixture. The wrapping leaves—the leaves of a tree called the *thanat*—were in a cream cracker biscuit tin. In a small cane sieve-tray she had a number of old *a-si-hkans*, stubs of solid ends, about 1½ to 2 inches long; and on a piece of paper was some boiled rice for sticking. She rolled the mixture in the leaf, tucked the edges of the narrower end neatly in and stuck

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# CHAPTER VIII

## CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

'Overcome anger by kindness, evil by good.'
*Dammapada.*

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NOT very many years ago an officer in Rangoon lost some currency notes. He had placed them upon his table overnight, and in the morning they were gone. The amount was not large. It was, if I remember rightly, thirty rupees; but the loss annoyed him, and as all search and inquiry proved futile, he put the matter in the hands of the police.

And before long — the very next day — the possession of the notes was traced to the officer's Burman servant, who looked after his clothes and attended on him at table. The boy was caught in the act of trying to change one of the notes. He was arrested, and he confessed. He was very hard up, he said, and his sister had written asking him to help her. He could not do so, and he was troubling himself about the matter early that morning while tidying the room, and he saw the notes on the table, and so he took them. It was a sudden temptation, and he fell. When the officer learnt

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all this, he would, I think, have withdrawn from the prosecution and forgiven the boy; but it was too late. In our English law theft is not compoundable. A complaint of theft once made must be proved or disproved; the accused must be tried before a magistrate. There is no alternative. So the lad—he was only a lad—was sent up before the magistrate, and he again pleaded guilty, and his master asked that the punishment might be light. The boy, he said, was an honest boy, and had yielded to a sudden temptation. He, the master, had no desire to press the charge, but the reverse. He would never have come to court at all if he could have withdrawn from the charge. Therefore he asked that the magistrate would consider all this, and be lenient.

But the magistrate did not see matters in the same light at all. He would consider his judgment and deliver it later on.

When he came into court again and read the judgment he had prepared, he said that he was unable to treat the case leniently. There were many such cases, he said. It was becoming quite common for servants to steal their employers' things, and they generally escaped. It was a serious matter, and he felt himself obliged to make an example of such as were convicted, to be a warning to others. So the boy was sentenced to six months' rigorous imprisonment; and his master went home, and before long had forgotten all about it.

But one day, as he was sitting in his veranda reading before breakfast, a lad came quickly up the stairs and into the veranda, and knelt down before

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him. It was the servant. As soon as he was released from gaol, he went straight to his old master, straight to the veranda where he was sure he would be sitting at that hour, and begged to be taken back again into his service. He was quite pleased, and sure that his master would be equally pleased, at seeing him again, and he took it almost as a matter of course that he would be reinstated.

But the master doubted.

'How can I take you back again?' he said. 'You have been in gaol.'

'But,' said the boy, 'I did very well in gaol. I became a warder with a cap white on one side and yellow on the other. Let the thakin ask.'

Still the officer doubted.

'I cannot take you back,' he repeated. 'You stole my money, and you have been in prison. I could not have you as a servant again.'

'Yes,' admitted the boy, 'I stole the thakin's money, but I have been in prison for it a long time —six months. Surely that is all forgotten now. I stole; I have been in gaol—that is the end of it.'

'No,' answered the master, 'unfortunately, your having been in gaol only makes matters much worse. I could forgive the theft, but the being in gaol—how can I forgive that?'

And the boy could not understand.

'If I have stolen, I have been in gaol for it. That is wiped out now,' he said again and again, till at last he went away in sore trouble of mind, for he could not understand his master, nor could his master understand him.

Each had his own idea of what was law, and

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685 what was justice, and what was punishment. To
671 the Burman all these words had one set of mean-
196 ings; to the Englishman they had another, a very different one. And each of them took his ideas from his religion. To all men the law here on earth is but a reflection of the heavenly law; the judge is the representative of his god. The justice of the court should be as the justice of heaven. Many nations have imagined their law to be heaven-given, to be inspired with the very breath of the Creator of the world. Other nations have derived their laws elsewhere. But this is of little account, for to the one, as to the other, the laws are a reflection of the religion.

681 And therefore on a man's religion depends all
671 his views of law and justice, his understanding of
779 the word 'punishment,' his idea of how sin should
196 be treated. And it was because of their different religions, because their religions differed so greatly on these points as to be almost opposed, that the English officer and his Burman servant failed to understand each other.

For to the Englishman punishment was a degradation. It seemed to him far more disgraceful that his servant should have been in gaol than that he should have committed theft. The theft he was ready to forgive, the punishment he could not. Punishment to him meant revenge. It is the revenge of an outraged and injured morality. The sinner had insulted the law, and therefore the law was to make him suffer. He was to be frightened into not doing it again. That is the idea. He was to be afraid of receiving punishment. And

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again his punishment was to be useful as a warning to others. Indeed, the magistrate had especially increased it with that object in view. He was to suffer that others might be saved. The idea of punishment being an atonement hardly enters into our minds at all. To us it is practically a revenge. We do not expect people to be the better for it. We are sure they are the worse. It is a deterrent for others, not a healing process for the man himself. We punish A. that B. may be afraid, and not do likewise. Our thoughts are bent on B., not really on A. at all. As far as he is concerned the process is very similar to pouring boiling lead into a wound. We do not wish or intend to improve him, but simply and purely to make him suffer. After we have dealt with him he is never fit again for human society. That was in the officer's thought when he refused to take back his Burmese servant.

Now see the boy's idea.

Punishment is an atonement, a purifying of the soul from the stain of sin. That is the only justification for, and meaning of, suffering. If a man breaks the everlasting laws of righteousness and stains his soul with the stain of sin, he must be purified, and the only method of purification is by suffering. Each sin is followed by suffering, lasting just so long as to cleanse the soul—not a moment less, or the soul would not be white; not a moment more, or it would be useless and cruel. That is the law of righteousness, the eternal inevitable sequence that leads us in the end to wisdom and peace. And as it is with the greater laws, so it should, the Buddhist thinks, be with the lesser laws.

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# CHAPTER XI

## THE MONKHOOD—II

'The restrained in hand, restrained in foot, restrained in speech, of the greatest self-control. He whose delight is inward, who is tranquil and happy when alone—him they call "mendicant."'—*Acceptance into the Monkhood.*

BESIDES being the ideal of the Buddhists, the monk is more: he is the schoolmaster of all the boys. It must be remembered that this is a thing aside from his monkhood. A monk need not necessarily teach; the aim and object of the monkhood is, as I have written in the last chapter, purity and abstraction from the world. If the monk acts as schoolmaster, that is a thing apart. And yet all monasteries are schools. The word in Burmese is the same; they are identified in popular speech and in popular opinion. All the monasteries are full of scholars, all the monks teach. I suppose much the same reasons have had influence here as in other nations: the desire of the parents that their children should learn religion in their childhood, the fact that the wisest and most honoured men entered the monkhood, the leisure of the monks giving them opportunity for such occupation.

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